

# Bard

Bard College  
Bard Digital Commons

---

Robert Kelly Manuscripts

Robert Kelly Archive

---

1-2018

**jan2018**

Robert Kelly

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts)

---

# Bard

= = = = =

Walking under the wing  
the Beethoven the million  
revelers in fur hats  
the endless midnights  
the joy that comes to  
remember us, the change  
in the weather, quiet  
subways, the river  
roaring calmly past  
under the ice, the actual.

We are so close to the  
beginning again, a cloak  
around your shoulders,  
smile for the camera  
so hard for me to smile  
I am permanently happy  
so this glum face of mine  
is my smile all the time

so I delight in the tumult,  
New Years, active city,  
what nice people Americans  
really are, innocent,  
trusting, kindly, ready  
to kiss and be happy,  
a land of why not and let's

try it, a land of sure,  
sharing not so much but  
eagles overhead, fireworks  
from China like everything  
else, wolf fur on your collar  
bow wow don't make me laugh  
it is all starting up again  
and we are newborn as can be,  
naked in our snug clothes,  
I mean snug, nice people,  
prompt to forgive, quicker  
to forget, I love you too,  
and yes we will all be siblings,  
lovers fiddling with locks,  
nice people, maybe even me.

1 January 2018

= = = = =

**Blue remembers us.  
I don't know what else  
it knows how to do,  
the sky. We have been  
in war and forgotten much  
in the depravity of capital.  
Winter comes along to show  
sheer cold beauty it bids  
us understand. Outside  
and inside the same, the left  
hand quiet in the lap.**

**1 January 2018**

## **A NEW YEAR**

**It's only risky  
if you see it as different  
from the old.  
It's all the same,  
it's you all over again,  
you the victim, the promised one,  
the only hope, the recuer.**

**1 January 2018**

= = = = =

**But all the important things  
haven't been said,  
tea to dunk cookies in.  
the cyclotron, that asteroid,  
organic kale. No, wait,  
just the moon in my hands.**

**1 January 2018**

= = = = =

If I knew  
how to be closer  
I would wake.  
Get up, go  
outside where it all  
according to legend  
is waiting always.  
And there you'd be  
silent as a scarecrow  
sumptuous as Saturdays.  
But I wouldn't know your  
name again, so the sun  
would whisper it to me.

1 January 2018

= = = = =

**We live in numbers.  
Dangerous. Numbers  
accumulate, numbers kill.**

**Forget them. Don't count.  
When is not important.  
Rome just fell, we still  
speak English, sort of,  
I have barely been born  
even now. Wait your turn,  
i'm almost finished.  
Or am I you already  
and I am done?**

**1 January 2018**



= = = = =

The overture  
is longer than the opera.  
It has to be —  
it has to do all the work  
when there;s so little  
to say or sing.

Open the door —  
all the rest is anti-climax,  
late afternnon, dusty cactus,  
your old aunt's living room.

1 January 2018

## **THREE SAD AVOWALS**

**Snow on roads then salt then cold  
and everything is white with remembering.**

**\***

**I know so little by myself.  
Language knows everything for me.**

**\***

**The secret of power  
is paying attention.  
And that is its terrible cost.**

**1.I.18**

= = = = =

**Maze with no middle  
ouzzles with no outcome.  
Modern mathematics  
elegant solutions to no problems.  
Null problems.**

**I am the Minotaur  
Imroar, I rage,  
I have no labyrinth to hide in,  
no path to the center of myself.**

**1 January 2018**

= = = = =

**Something I meant to remember  
will have to remember me instead.  
Now all I see is what I see, sun,  
snow, cars, caravans, comets,  
cat pawprints in the snow, big ones,  
catamount, empty cages, birds,  
walls crumbled, rpof holds firm,  
all I can think about is spring,  
save me, Lady, before I remember.**

**2 January 2018**

= = = = =

**Something about suffering.  
The orchestra. Josef Suk  
scherzo, life just happy  
enough to go on. The gaps  
in matter, in suffering  
go on millimeter by milliliter  
until we finally get there.  
Ehere? North of the Bronx,  
west of the Rhine. Paris  
would do in a pinch.**

**2 January 2018**

= = = = =

Released from dread  
one falls at last asleep.  
Sleep is a waiting room,  
you hear strange voices  
through the lawyer's door.  
Doctor's door. Priest's.  
Somebody in there is  
always talking about you.

2 January 2018

= = = = =

So from the fall  
forms everything:

a castle on a cushion  
satin offered to a queen  
throned on a water-lily

*art abolishes gravity*

the castle shimmers, shakes,  
lights in the ballroom

the queen peers in  
through the ogival windows  
and sees herself in there,  
all of her selves, dancing  
with all her others,  
a bishop is standing alone  
solemnly blessing the dancers.  
She smiles and hands  
the castle back, and floats away.

2 January 2018

## THE BROOKLYN RAIL

A n aquatic midsize bird. *Rallida brooklinica*, native to the shores and marshes of Long Island. It is a year-round resident. Its flight is swift, and has the unusual characteristic of preferring to fly into the wind instead of with it; in like manner, when on the water, it tends to beat against the current. It is skillful in discovering likely feeding locations and nesting places, so other shorebirds will often follow it to profit from its discoveries.

2.I.18



= = = = =

Silemce at the other end  
silence on the line.

Take pity on me, darkness,  
and make some sound

*sound lets us see*

It was as if some disease  
had called, and picking up the phone  
m,eant catching it,

having it, being what it turns  
a person into,  
always waiting and no one there.

3 January 2018

= = = = =

**What does one red car  
on a snowy field  
represent? I'll have  
to ask Emily, first**

**explaining what a car  
is and that's beyond me,  
really, but she could  
thoroughly explain the snow.**

**3 January 2018**

= = = = =

**Something quiet  
in the forehead**

**a thought sleeping  
breathing quietly**

**all around it  
a sense of waiting**

**for it to think.**

**3 January 2018**

= = = = =

**Weather was always here  
the fear is new**

**\***

**A man alone with the weather  
--that is tragedy.**

**3 January 2018**

## ROMANTICS

are disposed  
to be protective of something,

protect their emotions  
their beloveds their homeland  
their language

hence soon become paranoid.

Now that I see what I've just written  
I wonder if there is any oposte to romantic,  
someone who pushes beyond  
all these affections, protections —

someone who might say to me  
if you care so much about language  
why do you keep writing it down?

4 January 2018

= = = = =

**Wait till it's over  
it's only beginning**

**when it's well underway  
it's almost done**

**each of us has  
our own road to walk**

**we're almost there.**

**4 January 2018**

= = = = =

Gloom in discourse  
clouds sift snow down  
into the strong wind:

a huge white sentence  
shouted out at us

I went to the wrong  
school to understand

what all this whiteness says.

4 January 2018

= = = = =

**I am my landscape  
that's why it's hard  
for me to smile or show  
emotion facially.**

**Do pine trees smile?  
Does a brook ever frown?**

**Whatever it is I feel  
I have to say it,  
I have to write it down.**

**4 January 2018**



= = = = =

Measurement too is a flower,  
the fingers of number  
hold the pertal of each thing,  
fold them, test  
the tensile strmusic of their meat.  
Word. Stone. The distances themselves.

4 January 2018

= = = = =

**I have been neglecting my duty  
to study the clouds, guiding them  
around the skies of my mind  
in from their own blue neighborhood.**

**A cloud will tell you all you need to know  
but you have to lead it indoors,  
an honored guest, a pasha in your parlor,  
the room made just for talking, your head.**

**Now the cloud stretches out, prophesies.  
This one up there right now is telling me  
something about Europe, the Urals, a man  
weeping on a hillside, trying to be true.**

**5 January 2018**

= = = = =

**Keep talking —  
the birds are listening  
down in Costa Loca  
where I left my dream.**

**Parrots and cormorants,  
best of both worlds,  
and crows, the lords of heaven.**

**Can you hear me, friends?  
Is any word worth a feather?**

**5 January 2018**

= = = = =

**Listening to church bells  
when there are no churches there**

**the cool lagoon  
above the frozen earth  
this afternoon  
floated tropic clouds**

**church bells  
blue in my ears  
but no altar near**

**but a pirate ship  
that sails beneath the sea  
brings back  
my captured gold to me.**

**5 January 2018**

= = = = =

**Think about colors  
when they're gone —**

**in the black and white  
world of writing,  
where the chancery hand  
in legal documents  
calligraphy itself  
had to stand in for colors,  
cursive meant blue or violet,  
uncials meant red.**

**There is a green meadow  
in every open space,  
a meadow stretching out  
between paragraphs of prose.**

**5 / 6 January 2018**

= = = = =

## **Speedboats of the 1930s noisy on Memory Pond**

**how little thing  
to make so big**

**and roisterers aboard  
clad in white, caps**

**,**

**with peaks, scarves,  
long hair like the wind!**

**They told us the world  
would be like this**

**when we were old enough  
to buy our way in,**

**cars with no roofs,  
more scarves, more long hair,**

**sand only one lesson  
to be leaned: Give me more!**

**But now they all sail away  
silent on a sea of money**

**and poor me forgot to pay  
so play only by remembering.**

**6 January 2018**

## HOW TO WRITE

When mind goes one way  
and hand goes slower  
anybody can understand  
the few words left there

before the door closes  
and the horse runs away,  
I feel your thighs  
squeeze my withers

will I ever get to the hill in time?

6 January 2018



= = = = =

1.

Far

from any  
us I ever was  
that water goes.

The Hudson's frozen  
over now, they walk  
halfway across it  
but fifty years ago young  
Gaffney drove his MG  
on it all the way to Saugerties.

Histories. The water, though,  
knows none of this. Or all of it,  
carries its reflections south  
all the way to the great sea  
canyon nobody knows.

2.

What color are my hands?  
Whose eyes stand in for mine,  
we hurry to the island-of-getting-born,  
for any me. Any me  
sounds like enemy — is that  
clear water too, busy  
with eels up here and seals downstream

**and what do they breathe beneath the ice,  
I mean what do they dream.**

**People talk about the End Time  
but here I am  
and always will be,**

**sounds like enemy,  
holds your hand too,  
begs you to stay,**

**teaches you a little song  
to melt all the ice,  
lilacs and pussy willows**

**and a great city steaming in the sun.**

**7January 2018**

*for SQ*

What do I know about any you  
after all these years?  
A year is a short-haired mongrel  
can't be trusted, bites  
randomly, sleeps when it  
should be on guard.  
No point in trusting the years  
to tell me who you really are.

So take a sword to time, a machete  
to cut through all the undergrowth  
of endless days and furtive nights  
and come into this clean moment,

*Om Vajrasattva Hung*  
I've heard you say so often, to cleanse  
your heart of enemies, and cleanse  
the enemies' hearts too, forgive,  
Forgive, Because there are no enemies.

That much I know. How far you walk.  
How well you see.

2.  
The rest I have to guess.  
Slowly, awkwardly, I climb

in behind your eyes

and see the world improve  
right away, shadows keener,  
outlines sharper, animals

move smoothly, their fur  
glistens, a man's face  
looks at you and glows with light.

3.  
All these years  
you have been seeing.  
All around you  
people think they  
understand you,  
but they don't see  
what you see.  
So they don't see you.

4.  
That's none of my business.  
When I was a kid I wanted to be  
a troll who lived under the bridge,  
safe in the stone arch, a pal to water,  
under the thunder of traffic over,  
alone with the intelligent alewives,  
the springtime trout. And never  
ever have to talk to people, talk  
is so difficult, talking keeps a person

from seeing and hearing, talk  
is static on the radio. Remember  
radio? Water and stone and earth  
and roads and nowhere to go,  
people keep passing, murmuring,  
maybe even a little scared, talking  
is just another way of being afraid.

5.

So don't expect me to say anything much.  
You're part of the physics of things,  
and I feel comfortable with you as I do  
with trees and stones, those nimble stones  
your husband conjures, as I do with water,  
with the sky. The clouds are my children,  
did I ever tell you that? Maybe it's time I do.

7 January 2018

= = = = =

Caught off guard  
I answered the phone

words flowed down my ears  
I caught some in my throat

and sent them back,  
some of them. Time passed

There was silence again.  
Outside a solitary figure

vaguely masculine stepped  
downhill through the snow.

8 January 2018

= = = = =

Every anytime waiting by your shoes  
the message comes the mood demands  
all ythe subjunctives quiver intensely  
in the subways of thje heart — no metaphor  
intended, the blue rails run in — hope  
will get you nowhere, a decent city doesn't  
charge a man to walk along its streets,  
picking ripe pears at the Korean corner  
costs a little more than nothing but who  
of all our citizens understands the dollar?  
A curious word through Dutch from some  
lost valley in the busy Germanies of old.  
It used to be silver in a grandpa's hand  
dazzling the greedy child always hungry  
for more knowledge that the world allows.  
Permission is the rarest flower, pure white.

8 January 2018

= = = = =

When Columbus got home  
he kept a diary in Hebrew  
not always grammatical  
but who am I to judge, I  
who spell pigeon d-o-v-e,  
I who cast a smaller shadow  
than I should, I who stand  
a pagan in the shivering snow  
but still call myself a hero —  
wouldn't you? Poor Columbus,  
we blame him for ourselves.  
And of course he was Jewish—  
don't let that "Christopher"  
mislead you. Who but the Jews  
carried Christ into the world?

8 January 2018



= = = = =

*for Richard Strauss*

Not the melody  
but the intervals themselves  
of which melody is made,

the intervals he knew  
to wield the wild  
space between mind and heart

between breath and being.  
And in that rising ninth I heard  
everything I love come back to me.

8 January 2018

**HURRYING EAST**

                                  on a strange disease  
the thought slept harder,  
                                  it smelled  
of laurel on top of the head  
and it brought shadows with it  
uprooted from a forest past the sea.  
Believe him — no reason to lie  
except the fun of thinking it up.  
No other tongue has a word for fun.  
So few words! How the thought  
almost woke, racked with pity  
for all those who would think it.  
But does it work, says *Wake*  
*Now in a million minds, Wake*  
*and write this down — I am*  
*what language is really for.*

9 January 2018

= = = = =

**Waiting is like the cohabitation  
of sin with a sonnet.  
Or a dance insidiously slow  
counting the syllables of time,  
the awe-struck silences.  
Everything is beside the point.  
Inside this imperious moment  
a child crying for its mother  
somewhere lost in what's to come.**

**9 January 2018**

= = = = =

**Roebuck, remember?  
Robert Graves on stage  
at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y  
swaying like a boxer  
telling the ancient story  
he was first to declare.  
Roebuck and the woman  
of white barley, memory  
unpieced, haunted islands,  
the secret revealed, then lost  
again. Only the hidden  
meaning matters. Behind  
even this house a thicket  
where deer drift in snow.**

**9 January 2018**

= = = = =

Things that matter most  
in the middle of the night  
when nothing works but memory.

Building that cabin in the woods  
wildturkey peeking in the window,  
birds are more curious than men

that's why they're able to fly.  
When's the last time you tried  
to see through a bug-hole in some leaf—

what did you see that made you  
look away? Answer my questions  
and the bird will let you go back to sleep.

9 January 2018

= = = = =

The taste of it  
rising through sunlight  
like walking through Astoria  
past Ritter's bakery—  
I remember his daughter

but we are the ones  
for whom the world was made  
thought by fear by desire,  
yearning, sweet buns in the window,  
cinnamon disasters

a memory is a jogger  
running past, his T-shirt  
has a word on it  
he goes too fast for you to read,  
her ponytail swings  
long after in your mind

Darkness wavers,  
the bridge lights up.  
We cross today  
to the other side of now,  
purple lights at night

and midway on the span  
a flagpole, flag  
straight pointing  
north in a stiff breeze—  
ocean!

Get the numbers right.  
Can't do it by counting.  
Smell of coffee too,  
they roast it rarely,  
neighborhood habits,  
chalk on sidewalk,  
walk on a heart  
but whose?

Teach the child to repeat  
“Someone else lives where I  
used to live, and I live  
where somebody else did.”  
This is as good as going to church  
or learning to play the harmonica.  
And when it’s time for the toga virilis  
he’ll need no sleeve to wipe his tears

memory’s monotheist.  
Worship only one at a time,  
don’t let one lead you astray  
the hungry desert always waiting  
choked with images

Everybody’s father  
did something different.  
Doctor, baker, garbageman, banker,  
every father was master of numbers,  
times of day, calendars, money.  
Fathers of Friends are fearsome.  
they rule a world  
I had no wish to enter.  
But after the first fatal cigarette



**you slide downhill into maturity,  
lost among grownups, the baker's  
daughter just a shadow on the wall.**

**10 January 2018**

= = = = =

**Miracles are real as the minds that witness them  
this leper has been cleansed many a time.**

**10 January 2018**

= = = = =

The filling of the pen  
Leviticus

*Wayiqra*

ritual purity begins  
with speaking the heart

*cardiophany*

the words  
reveal.

Purity  
is a sound in the sky  
a bird flying by.

Cleanse the wall  
with looking.  
Cleanse your heart  
by speaking.

10 January 2018

= = = = =

**My natural way  
is line by line—  
that's how I breathe,**

**morning's asthmatic,  
afternoon robust,  
evenings riverine, fluminous.**

**Blue words on a white page,  
what beautiful weather!  
(This is what I whisper in confession.)**

**10 January 2018**

= = = = =

Is there anything left for me?  
A bowl of dried figs poached  
now to make them tender,  
a pan shallow with water,  
not a hint of moonlight, a cloud  
like a dancer stretched all  
around the sky. None of these  
allotted, all of them seized  
by sensory appetite. Senses  
are the wolves of the world,  
ravaging up everything. Hear  
the car passing much too fast,  
a sound that breaks the law,  
The law. Leviticus. Interferences  
with natural attentiveness  
to all that passes near us, all  
we can reach and apprehend.  
So it's all for me and none of it.  
Maybe Eden was too easy.  
Maybe we've always been wrong.

10 January 2018

= = = = =

**The Choros enters here  
slogging through mud  
they make it look like dance**

**they sing, happy workshop  
pretend there are birds  
singing too, springtime**

**what does song have to do  
with tragedy, the very word  
means goat-song, the song**

**they sing when they kill  
the goat for some god.  
we all know how to hear it still.**

**11 January 2018**



= = = = =

**Children in the air  
floating towards their mothers  
who leap up to catch  
the favored one but  
often have to settle  
for a lesser fish,  
some blinking child.**

**On other planets  
all this is done  
differently, with spoons  
or flowerbeds  
or even in the body  
of the one who leaps.**

**11 January 2018**



**there is a blue box  
when I type  
it appears around each letter  
and is blue**